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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study involving 108 undergraduates investigated effects of equivocation, order of agreeable and disagreeable issues, source credibility, and time on the receiver's agreement with and recall of messages. Results indicated that both equivocated messages and high-credibility sources produced significantly more agreement. Recall was significantly better for clearly stated issues than for equivocated disagreeable issues, and it was better immediately following exposure to the message than it was two weeks later. Results were discussed in terms of information processing theory, focusing on the relationship between the affective domain and the cognitive domain. (Author/AA)

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EQUIVOCATION: HOW DOES IT AFFECT
RECEIVER AGREEMENT AND RECALL?

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EQUIVOCATION: HOW DOES IT AFFECT RECEIVER AGREEMENT AND RECALL

Perhaps the most commonly accepted principle of rhetorical investigations is the contention that if a speaker is to be successful he must identify the nature of his audience and adapt his message to that audience. Aristotle was unequivocal in his claim that effective persuasion was ultimately dependent on a comprehensive investigation of the audience and the arguments, and from this invention would emerge the potential for persuasion. Discovering "all the available means of persuasion" is a maxim understood by the successful persuader and a principle of persuasion which has maintained the endorsement of rhetorical theory since the classical period.

An apparent contradiction emerges, however, if we accept the proposition that the speaker should always adapt his speech to the audience and at the same time call for a style which is always straightforward, addressing all issues clearly. Are we to assume that there is no situation where the speaker's analysis of the audience might indicate that the most effective strategy would be to encode a very vague message? Contemporary speech texts do not shed much insight on this issue since they typically prescribe that a good speech is one which avoids all forms of vagueness and elicits within the receiver responses that are consistent and congruent with what the source had in mind. For example, Scheidel (1972) contends that "you should try to use concrete and specific terms rather than abstract and general ones" (p. 321), and Pace and Boren (1973) suggest that we should "strive to present messages that facilitate immediate, maximum information-acquisition, information-storage, and information-retrieval by the hearers" (p. 135).

Even though message vagueness has been a subject of considerable criticism, there are a variety of misunderstandings surrounding the issue of message equivocation which need to be considered. First, we should not equate vagueness with untruthfulness. To encode a vague message is not necessarily to encode a lie or untruthful statement. Indeed, vagueness is not even a necessary condition for lying to occur, since most lies explicitly identify their referents. Second, it should be realized that all words contain some degree of vagueness, and instead of being inherently bad, vagueness, like rhetoric, appears to be an amoral means which can be applied to produce many different ends. Finally, we should not confuse the use of vagueness in informative speaking with vagueness in persuasive speaking. In those communication situations where the emphasis is strictly on the efficient transmission of bits of information from point one to point two it does not make any sense to purposefully encode a vague message. In this situation the traditional plea for absolute clarity is well taken; however, a problem arises when we apply this principle indiscriminately to all forms of communication, particularly to persuasive communication. The use of deliberate vagueness might serve as an effective rhetorical strategy.

When we consider the practical dimensions of public persuasion, we soon become aware of the fact that deliberately obscuring verbal meaning is rather common. Within the political arena of communication, equivocation is a well established practice, and Gerbner goes so far as to say that "it is a political necessity to engage in calculated ambiguity in the use of symbols so that different constituent groups may derive different types of gratification from the symbol" (Thayer, 1967, p. 477). Alston (1964) also contends that there are certain contexts where it is

better to use vague rather than specific terms, and he cites politics as a prime example. Politicians and diplomats have practiced the art of equivocation for centuries, for they have found that success in politics often depends on keeping the opposition guessing and in leaving open a wide range of alternatives. The question is not whether a diplomat should use purposefully vague language; rather, can he afford not to.

The discussion presented above leads us to an interesting question concerning the selection of the most effective persuasive strategy. That is, what should a speaker do when he knows that the audience he must address is heterogeneous and a significant portion of the audience openly or perhaps vehemently disagrees with him on certain issues? Given this situation, there are at least four options open to the speaker. Perhaps the simplest resolution to the problem would be to avoid confrontation and misunderstanding altogether by not even addressing the audience. Another possibility would be to give the speech but to ignore completely all issues which hold the potential for disagreement. These two approaches are commonly used and are often effective; however, they are rather limited in their application. In the political arena, where this strategy dilemma typically occurs, public officials are expected to make public appearances and deal with the important issues confronting their constituents. To constantly avoid the issues would be a dereliction of political responsibility and evoke criticism from the voters.

A third possible strategy would be for the speaker to take the advice of many speech texts and clearly address all issues, completely unfolding the intricacies of his position regardless of the nature of the audience. But this approach would probably be disastrous since it would likely alienate many in the audience, encourage hostility from some, and possibly contribute to a loss in speaker credibility.

A fourth alternative for the speaker addressing a disagreeing audience would be to use deliberate vagueness, i. e., to address those issues which he feels are acceptable to the audience and to equivocate those issues with which they disagree. This strategy should not be viewed as a persuasive device designed to produce attitude change in the audience. Instead it is best viewed as a stalling strategy which at best would slightly improve the status of the speaker, and at worst prevent a loss in credibility or maintain an uncommitted audience predisposition. Equivocation might possibly avoid the creation of initial negative audience responses which could damage future persuasive attempts where the speaker would have to overcome the handicap of the previous speaking event. By using equivocation, the speaker should be better prepared for subsequent persuasive encounters, perhaps more personal in nature, where the issues may be presented in clearer detail and where the listener is confronted on more of a one-to-one basis.

Very little research has been directed toward better understanding the use of deliberate vagueness, but the available research does look promising. In a rhetorical case study of Prime Minister Gladstone's handling of the Irish home rule debates in 1886 in the British House of Commons, Hufford (1962) discovered that Gladstone's vagueness throughout the campaign was profitable to his cause and produced no detrimental effects on society. In terms of empirical studies, Samovar (1962) investigated the 1960 Nixon-Kennedy debates and found that vague messages produced more different interpretations than clear messages and that vague messages were often distorted by the receiver in accordance with his own attitude. Zimbardo (1960), analyzing the assimilation of equivocated messages, found that subjects who had a positive attitude toward the topic

under evaluation judged the vague sentences as more favorable than those who had a negative attitude. More recently Goss and Williams (1973) found that equivocating issues with which the audience disagreed could positively effect the speaker's character ratings but that equivocation had no significant effect on competence ratings. Additional research by Williams and Goss (1975) replicated these findings for character and competence ratings of the speaker as well as discovered that even though a message which contained equivocation was perceived as more vague than a clearly stated message, this perception did not have a negative effect on their agreement with the message. It was theorized that equivocation tends to suppress incongruent meanings so that the listener calls up only congruent interpretations, thus increasing the probability for more agreement and higher perceptions of credibility.

The present study is another attempt to better understand the effects of equivocation, specifically on agreement with the message and recall of the message. Looking only at the singular effect of clear versus equivocated messages assumes a rather simple model of communication, however, and it fails to integrate the more complex realities of human behavior. Indeed, it goes against the trend in contemporary attitude research which McGuire (1969) indicates has shifted in recent years to formulating and testing interaction hypotheses instead of looking merely at main effects. It is for this reason that the additional independent variables of source credibility, order of presentation of agreeable and disagreeable issues, and time will be investigated along with message equivocation. A variety of interesting questions emerge when we consider these potential interaction effects on agreement with the message. For example, are equivocated messages beneficial only to high credible sources or does it also operate to

the advantage of a low credible source? Is the receiver more disposed toward assimilating equivocated issues if they are presented in an agree-disagree order or if they are presented in a disagree-agree order? Does an equivocated message produce more agreement immediately after exposure to the message, does it have a long-term effect, or is it equally effective immediately after exposure as well as after the passing of time?

In terms of recall of the message, there is the possibility that equivocated messages could be more difficult to recall than clearly stated messages since they do not provide specific cues which the receiver can tag for subsequent retrieval. This would tend to facilitate greater forgetting. Like attitude research, however, the most interesting questions in terms of receiver recall probably are those involving the interaction of multiple independent variables. But unlike attitude research, there is no indication that source credibility produces more recall of the message (Johnson, Torcivia, and Poprick, 1968; Singer, 1969).

In an effort to address these questions and to gain a better understanding of the independent effects of equivocation as well as how it interacts with other independent variables to create differences in agreement and recall, the following hypotheses were tested:

- H1: An equivocated message will produce significantly more agreement than will a clear message.
- H2: An equivocated message will produce significantly less recall of the disagreeable information than will a clear message.
- H3: There will be a significant interaction between the degree of message vagueness, message order, time, and source credibility when receiver agreement is measured.
- H4: There will be a significant interaction between the degree of message vagueness, message order, and time when receiver recall is measured.

Method

Subjects. A total of 155 undergraduate students enrolled in the speech communication course at the University of Oklahoma served as subjects in the experimental manipulation. Subjects were randomly assigned to the various treatment conditions.

Design. A four-factor mixed design with one repeated factor ($2 \times 2 \times 3 \times 2$) was employed in this study. Message vagueness, order of agree-disagree issues, and source credibility were the fixed independent factors, while time served as the repeated factor. The effects of these independent factors were assessed individually on receiver agreement and recall of the equivocated issues.

Independent Variables. Before the manipulation of treatment conditions a pilot study employing 97 additional students from the speech communication course was run in order to determine a salient topic for the subject population, issues on that topic which were agreeable and disagreeable, clear as well as vague encodings of the disagreeable issues, and sources of high and low credibility. Of the five contemporary topics tested, "What should be included in a liberal college education?" proved to be the most salient. After considering 13 issues related to what should be included in a liberal college education, three issues were found to be consistently more agreeable than the others and three issues were found to be consistently more disagreeable. Students felt that social science courses, ethnic studies courses, and mathematics should be included, whereas A-F grading, required courses, and foreign language courses should not be included in a liberal education.

Two messages were created -- a clearly stated message and an equivocated message. The clear message advocated that all six of the issues presented above should be included in a liberal college education; therefore, this message was congruent with the students' attitudes on the first three issues

but incongruent with their attitudes on the latter three. The equivocated message clearly advocated the first three issues which were congruent with the audience, but equivocated the latter three issues which were known to be disagreeable to the audience. Instead of arguing that "students should be graded on an A-F grading scale," the equivocated statement was that "students should be evaluated by some systematic grading scale," Instead of saying that "students should follow a strict schedule of required courses," the equivocated message read that "students should be encouraged to follow a degree program which has been designed by professional educators." Finally, in place of "students should take foreign language courses, such as French, Spanish, and German," the equivocated message stated that students should take courses which "concentrate on the communication behavior of other countries." Following each of the six issues there was a brief rationale or supporting statement which elaborated on why that issue should be included in a liberal education.

The final piece of information gained from the pilot study was the names of individuals who were perceived as being high or low in credibility. After considering six sources it was discovered that Dr. Paul Sharp (president of the University of Oklahoma) was perceived as a high credible source and Curtis Harris (district attorney for Oklahoma County) was perceived as a low credible source.

The order of agree-disagree issues was operationally defined as presenting half of the subjects with the three agreeable issues first followed by the three disagreeable issues (agree-disagree order) or presenting the three disagreeable issues first followed by the three agreeable issues (disagree-agree order). The final independent factor was the repeated measure of time. It was defined as measurement immediately following the treatment condition and measurement approximately two weeks later.

Dependent Variables. To measure receiver agreement, five bipolar semantic differential-type scales were used. The bipolar scales were: strongly agree-strongly disagree, right-wrong, positive-negative, good-bad, and wise-foolish. Each scale ranged from 1 to 7, and since the sum of the five scales was used as the agreement measure, the potential range of the scale was from 5 (indicating low agreement) to 35 (indicating high agreement).

Two separate measures of receiver recall were used--number of disagreeable issues recalled and the quality of disagreeable issues recalled. The number of disagreeable issues recalled was simply the sum of disagreeable issues each subject could recall, either in the equivocated or clearly stated form depending on which condition he received. Since there were three disagreeable issues in each message, the potential score on this index of recall was from 0 to 3. The quality of disagreeable issues recalled was measured by evaluating each disagreeable issue on a scale ranging from 0 (indicating no recall of the issue) to 5 (indicating verbatim recall of the issue). Scores were summed across the three disagreeable issues, thus creating a quality of recall scale ranging from 0 to 15.

Procedures. The study was administered in two parts. At the first session, one of 12 different booklets was randomly distributed to the subjects. The booklets contained: (1) an introduction to the study which was posed as a student survey on what should be included in a liberal college education, (2) the identification of a high credible source (Dr. Paul Sharp), low credible source (Curtis Harris), or an unidentified source, and a brief statement about the source, and (3) the message where disagreeable issues were clearly stated or equivocated and where the order of the issues was either agree-disagree or disagree-agree. After allowing approximately five minutes for the subjects to read through the booklet and to become familiar with the message, all booklets were collected. Sheets containing the dependent variables were then distributed and subjects were asked to indicate their agreement with the message as well as recall as many

of the issues presented in the message as they could. As a manipulation check, subjects were also asked to complete a seven point semantic differential-type scale using vague-specific as bipolar adjectives, with a score of 7 indicating that the statement was perceived as being specific.

In addition to these experimental conditions, a booklet designed to assess the subjects' evaluation of the credibility of Dr. Paul Sharp and Curtis Harris on the topic what should be included in a liberal college education was randomly distributed to subjects. Using seven point semantic differential-type scales, intelligent-unintelligent, qualified-unqualified, and competent-incompetent were the bipolar scales used to measure competence. Good-bad, reliable-unreliable, and just-unjust were the bipolar scales used to measure character. Each of the credibility scales had a potential range from 3 to 21, a low score indication, low credibility.

The second session commenced approximately two weeks later (either 13 or 14 days after the initial testing). All subjects were again asked to fill out the agreement measure and to recall all the issues they could which were presented in the message they had previously heard on what should be included in a liberal college education.

Statistical Analysis. The data were analyzed using an analysis of variance for three fixed independent factors and one repeated factor (Winer, 1971, pp. 559-571). To achieve equal cell size, subjects were randomly removed from experimental conditions until there were 9 subjects per cell, thus producing a total of 108 subjects used in the final analysis. (Before removing extra subjects from the various conditions, each of the 12 experimental groups contained a minimum of 9 subjects and a maximum of 11 subjects.) Differences were considered significant at the .05 level of significance.

Results

Manipulation Check. An analysis of the results indicated that both source credibility and the perceived vagueness of the message were successfully manipulated. Using only those subjects assigned the task of assessing the credibility of the sources, a t test was run in order to determine the differences between the high and low credible sources. Dr. Paul Sharp ($\bar{X} = 18.30$) was perceived as significantly higher in competence than Curtis Harris ($\bar{X} = 7.35$) ($t = 9.34$; $df = 18$; $p < .001$). The same pattern held for the character dimension where Sharp ($\bar{X} = 16.75$) ($t = 9.60$; $df = 18$; $p < .001$). In addition, the analysis of variance for the perceived vagueness of the message revealed that the clear message ($\bar{X} = 5.38$) was significantly more clear than the equivocated message ($\bar{X} = 4.51$) ($F = 9.73$; $df = 1/96$, $p < .01$).

So as to insure an objective and valid measure of quality of recall, three judges independently scored the subjects' recall of each of the disagreeable issues in both the clear and equivocated conditions. Inter-judge reliabilities ranged from .879 to .974, with a mean inter-judge reliability of .928.

Hypothesized Findings. Of the four hypotheses tested in this study, one was confirmed, one was partially supported, and two were not confirmed. With regard to Hypothesis 1 (see Appendix, Tables 1 & 2), the equivocated message ($\bar{X} = 22.34$) produced significantly more agreement than the clear message ($\bar{X} = 17.41$) ($F = 14.73$; $df = 1/96$; $p < .001$). Hypothesis 2 was supported in terms of the quality of disagreeable issues recalled but not confirmed with regard to the number of disagreeable issues recalled (see Appendix, Tables 3, 4, 5 & 6). The quality of recall of the equivocated messages ($\bar{X} = 3.55$) was significantly worse than the quality of recall of the clearly stated

disagreeable issues ($\bar{X}=4.87$) ($F=8.97$; $df=1/96$; $p<.01$). For the number of disagreeable issues recalled, significance was approached but not quite achieved ($F=3.89$; $df=1/96$; $p<.06$). Analysis of the mean scores did indicate, however, that fewer equivocated issues ($\bar{X}=1.77$) were recalled than clearly stated disagreeable issues ($\bar{X}=2.04$):

Hypothesis 3 predicted that the degree of message vagueness, message order, time, and source credibility would interact to affect agreement (see Appendix, Tables 1 & 2). This interaction hypothesis was not confirmed ($F=1.79$; $df=2/96$; $p<.18$). *Hypothesis 4* predicted a significant interaction between message vagueness, message order, and time with regard to the receiver recall of the message (see Appendix, Tables 3, 4, 5, & 6). In terms of the quality of disagreeable issues recalled, the hypothesis was clearly disconfirmed ($F=1.67$; $df=1/96$; $p<.19$); however, for the number of disagreeable issues recalled the hypothesis approached significance ($F=2.96$; $df=1/96$; $p<.08$).

Unhypothesized Findings. Several unhypothesized results achieved significance. Consistent with previous literature, the high credible source produced significantly more agreement than did the low credible source ($\bar{X}=21.75$ vs. $\bar{X}=17.05$) while the unidentified source ($\bar{X}=20.82$) fell between the high and low credible source conditions ($F=4.98$; $df=2/96$; $p<.01$) (see Appendix, Tables 1 & 2).

Also in keeping with previous research, significantly more disagreeable issues were recalled at time one ($\bar{X}=2.05$) than at time two ($\bar{X}=1.76$) ($F=16.86$; $df=1/96$; $p<.001$); and the quality of recall of disagreeable issues was significantly better at time one ($\bar{X}=5.27$) than at time two ($\bar{X}=3.15$) ($F=120.48$; $df=1/96$; $p<.0001$) (see Appendix, Tables 3, 4, 5, & 6).

Even though it did not reach the established level of significance, there was a strong tendency for a source by time interaction in terms of receiver

agreement with the message ($F = 2.77$; $df = 2/96$; $p < .06$) (See Appendix, Tables 1 & 2). These results indicate a tendency toward a "sleeper effect" since the influence of the high credible source decreased from time one to time two ($\bar{X} = 22.19$ to $\bar{X} = 21.30$) while the effect of the low credible source increased from time one to time two ($\bar{X} = 16.28$ to $\bar{X} = 17.83$).

Discussion

Agreement Results. The data clearly demonstrates that the equivocation of disagreeable issues is much more acceptable to the receiver than clearly stating disagreeable issues. This finding is best explained from an information processing perspective. Faced with the task of deciding how he feels about an incoming message, the receiver must evaluate the message and other environmental factors in relation to his own category system and frame of reference. If a message is clearly at odds with this category system, the decision for rejection is quite easy. When faced with an equivocated message, however, the receiver is less sure of the meaning and thus assigns meanings congruent with his own frame of reference so as to achieve some degree of cognitive balance. Research demonstrating man's desire for cognitive balance is well established in the literature (Heider, 1958), as is the notion that people will distort messages in an effort to fit their existing cognitive categories (Zimbardo, 1960; Manis, 1961). It seems that an equivocated message is more acceptable to the receiver since it allows more flexibility in interpreting the speaker's meaning, even though the speaker's true feelings might not be completely understood by the receiver. While the equivocated message falls within the receiver's latitude of noncommitment or latitude of acceptance, clearly stated disagreeable issues fall in his latitude of rejection. One message is tolerated or even accepted while the other is disruptive and rejected.

An analysis of the results for the dependent variable of agreement indicates that the main effects for source credibility and message vagueness

are the most meaningful claims that can be drawn from the data. Message vagueness did not interact with any of the other independent variables investigated in the present study to produce significant results. Even though the hypothesized interaction between degree of message vagueness, message order, time, and source credibility was not significant, an analysis of the individual mean scores reveals an interesting trend. The condition which produced the least agreement was the condition containing the low credible speaker, clearly stated disagreeable issues, disagree-agree order, at time one ($\bar{X} = 14.44$). The greatest amount of agreement occurred in the condition containing the high credible source, equivocated/disagreeable issues, agree-disagree order, at time one ($\bar{X} = 29.55$). Future research should explore this potential interaction relationship in more detail to determine if indeed it is meaningful.

Recall Results. For both the number of disagreeable issues recalled and the quality of disagreeable issues recalled, more was recalled at time one than at time two. These findings are not surprising and support previous research. With the passage of time and the interference of subsequent information, the information processor loses the cues for recall. The present study also indicates that the quality of recall of equivocated disagreeable issues was significantly worse than the quality of recall of clearly stated disagreeable issues, and that the same pattern was present for the number of equivocated and clearly stated disagreeable issues even though the difference was not statistically different. These findings support the notion that equivocating disagreeable issues does not provide as meaningful a cue for retrieval as does a clearly stated disagreeable issue; therefore, there is a greater probability for equivocated issues to be forgotten more quickly.

Hypothesis 4 predicted a three way interaction between message vagueness, message order, and time in terms of the number of disagreeable issues recalled and the quality of disagreeable issues recalled. While

the hypothesis was not confirmed, some interesting trends emerge from an analysis of the cell means which merit further consideration. The poorest recall occurred when disagreeable issues were equivocated, in agree-disagree order, measured at time two ($\bar{X}=1.44$ for number recalled and $\bar{X}=2.13$ for quality of recall). The best recall occurred when disagreeable issues were clearly stated, in disagree-agree order, measured at time two ($\bar{X}=2.33$ for number recalled and $\bar{X}=6.25$ for quality of recall). Even though this speculation is based on nonsignificant interaction results, the trend poses some interesting possibilities since they suggest that the recall of disagreeable issues might be dependent on factors other than message vagueness. These results suggest that clearly stated messages where disagreeable issues are presented first provide an easier task for immediate recall than does an equivocated message where the disagreeable issues are presented last. Additional research needs to be directed toward clarifying how message vagueness and order interact with time to effect the amount and quality of recall.

Relationship between Agreement and Recall. The results of this study indicate that receiver agreement and recall are both influenced by message vagueness. With agreement the equivocation of disagreeable issues produced significantly more overall agreement, and with recall significantly more forgetting occurred when the disagreeable issues were equivocated. Agreement and recall, however, were not equally affected by all the independent variables investigated in this study. Source credibility had much more of an influence on agreement than it had on recall. This finding is not surprising since prior research demonstrates that recall is rarely improved or weakened due to the credibility of the source (Singer, 1969). In contrast, the time variable seemed to have a greater effect on recall than on agreement. More specifically, the quality of recall seemed to vary more over time than did agreement.

These findings lead us to some interesting questions regarding the relationship between agreement and recall. For example, what is the relationship between the cognitive domain (consisting of factual material and knowledge) and the affective domain (consisting of feelings, attitudes, and predispositions)? Is one domain superior to the other or are they of equal importance in the processing of information? Over time is agreement with a previously heard message dependent on the recall of the content and factual information which produced it or is future agreement dependent merely upon a recall of the previously established attitude itself? That is, does the passing of time and interference of subsequent information inhibit the recall of a previously formed attitude more than the recall of the information which was used to create the attitude?

Watts and McGuire (1964) have produced evidence to indicate that as time passes, induced opinion change and recall become more autonomous. The present study tends to indicate a similar phenomenon. There was very little change over the two week interval for agreement, but there was a significant decline between time one and time two for the recall of the disagreeable issues. There was no significant difference in agreement with the message at time one ($\bar{X}=19.57$) compared to time two ($\bar{X}=20.17$) ($F=1.76$; $df=1/96$; $p < .18$); however, both measures of recall demonstrated significant differences over time, especially the quality of disagreeable issues measure (time one $\bar{X}=5.27$ and time two $\bar{X}=3.15$; $F=120.46$; $df=1/96$; $p < .0001$). This tends to indicate that the attitudes we hold are not simply a function of the information producing them but that attitudes serve as a higher level organization mechanism which allows us to process and categorize large amounts of information but retain only a portion of the original input. Instead of trying to understand and store the factual details of a message, our attitudes allow us immediate evaluation and

simple categorization. Our experiences are tagged as "right-wrong," "good-bad," or "liked-disliked," and the message is processed just enough to determine how we feel about the topic under consideration. As a result, our cue for recall is the attitude we have created instead of the message content. Unlike the laboring task of having to generate an organizational hierarchy of factual material for the purpose of subsequent recall, attitude recall is much more parsimonious and effort saving. Our bias is toward being affectively oriented, with cognitive material being placed in a supportive position in the processing of information. It appears that our attitudes and feelings serve as the "Roman Numerals" in our organizational structure with factual information serving merely as a subdivision and as supporting evidence.

This speculation has some important implications for the rhetorical use of equivocation. It would indicate that in terms of eliciting a favorable response from the audience, a speaker should not become so preoccupied with explicitly disclosing his position that he overlooks the disposition it might create in the receiver. If the speaker knows that certain issues are disagreeable and if he feels that the circumstances seriously limit the probability of successful persuasion, then equivocation appears to be the best alternative available. It provides the speaker with an effective means for avoiding premature exposure of his innermost feelings, it leaves the receiver with a neutral to moderately favorable disposition, it minimizes the chances of recalling the disagreeable issues, and it avoids negative connotations which might jeopardize future persuasive attempts.

In contrast to the tenet advocated since antiquity that all issues should be addressed clearly, this study indicated that under certain circumstances the speaker might be wiser if he used deliberate vagueness. This research reveals that the purposeful use of equivocation might have considerable potential as a rhetorical technique, serving as a stalling strategy instead of

an attitude change strategy. More research needs to be done so as to better understand the effects of equivocation. Future investigations might focus more on the number of equivocated arguments used in a message that is perceived as being agreeable to determine if there is an optimal ratio of equivocated messages compared to clear messages. Instead of looking at the placement of equivocated messages at the beginning or the end of the message, the most effective position might be to "hide" the equivocated issues in the middle of the message. More research is also needed to better understand the relationship between cognitive and affective information. Longer messages with more issues and information which challenged the memory capacity of the subjects should be useful in clarifying this relationship and the role equivocated arguments play in the processing of this information.

Summary

This exploratory study investigated the affects of equivocation, order of agree-disagree issues, source credibility, and time on the dependent variables of receiver agreement and recall. One hundred and eight (108) undergraduate students were randomly assigned to conditions in a four factor mixed design with one repeated factor ($2 \times 2 \times 3 \times 2$ design). Equivocation was defined as a message which clearly addressed agreeable issues and equivocated (i.e. deliberately made vague) disagreeable issues, while a clear message clearly addressed both agreeable and disagreeable issues. Order of agree-disagree issues was defined as the presentation of three agreeable issues in the first part of the message followed by three disagreeable issues, or vice versa. Source credibility was defined as high, low, or unidentified. The time variable was defined as measurement immediately after exposure to the message and two weeks later.

The results indicated that with regard to attitude agreement there was a significant main effect due to message vagueness (with the equivocated

message producing more agreement) and credibility (with the high credible source evoking more agreement). A strong tendency toward a time by source interaction was also detected, even though it was not statistically significant. This finding tended to indicate a "sleeper effect." For the number and quality of disagreeable issues recalled, there was a significant main effect for time (with more recall at time one). A significant main effect for message equivocation was also found for the quality of disagreeable issues recalled, where clearly stated disagreeable issues were recalled better than equivocated disagreeable issues.

The results were discussed in terms of information processing theory, focusing on the relationship between the affective domain (agreement and feelings) and the cognitive domain (factual material). It was concluded that with the passage of time, attitudes and recall of the message become autonomous, and that we are more likely to recall our previously formed attitudes rather than the factual information which produced the attitudes. Our cue for recall is the attitude we have created instead of the message content. This information was related to the rhetorical use of equivocation where it was explained that an equivocated message leaves the receiver with a neutral to moderately favorable disposition, it minimizes the chances of recalling the disagreeable issues, and it avoids negative connotations which might jeopardize future persuasive attempts.

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APPENDIX

TABLE 1

MEAN SCORES FOR AGREEMENT

			Time 1	Time 2
High Credible Source	Clearly Stated Disagree Message	Clearly Agree- Clearly Disagree Order	16.222	15.888
		Clearly Disagree- Clearly Agree Order	19.444	19.666
	Equiv. Disagree Message	Clearly Agree- Equiv. Disagree Order	29.555	27.333
		Equiv. Disagree- Clearly Agree Order	23.555	22.333
Low Credible Source	Clearly Stated Disagree Message	Clearly Agree- Clearly Disagree Order	15.444	18.444
		Clearly Disagree- Clearly Agree Order	14.444	15.333
	Equiv. Disagree Message	Clearly Agree- Equiv. Disagree Order	18.222	18.666
		Equiv. Disagree- Clearly Agree Order	17.000	18.888
Unidentified Source	Clearly Stated Disagree Message	Clearly Agree- Clearly Disagree Order	18.000	18.222
		Clearly Disagree- Clearly Agree Order	17.444	20.333
	Equiv. Disagree Message	Clearly Agree- Equiv. Disagree Order	21.888	23.666
		Equiv. Disagree- Clearly Agree Order	23.666	23.333

Main Effect	Mean
High Credible Source	21.750
Low Credible Source	17.055
Unidentified Source	20.819
Clearly Stated Disagree Message	17.407
Equivocated Disagree Message	22.342
Agree-Disagree Order	20.129
Disagree-Agree Order	19.620
Time One	19.574
Time Two	20.175

TABLE 2
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE FOR AGREEMENT

SOURCE	SS	DF	MS	F	P
Between Subjects	11494.190	107			
A (Credibility)	889.750	2	444.875	4.983	0.009*
B (Vagueness)	1315.250	1	1315.250	14.732	0.0005**
C (Order)	14.063	1	14.063	0.157	0.695
AB	285.688	2	142.844	1.600	0.205
AC	43.376	2	21.688	0.243	0.788
BC	84.313	1	84.313	0.944	0.665
ABC	291.062	2	145.531	1.630	0.200
Error (Between)	8570.688	96	89.278		
Within Subjects	1209.462	108			
T (Time)	19.563	1	19.563	1.761	0.184
TA	61.500	2	30.750	2.768	0.066
TB	16.125	1	16.125	1.452	0.229
TC	0.750	1	0.750	0.067	0.791
TAB	2.250	2	1.125	0.101	0.903
TAC	2.876	2	1.438	0.129	0.879
TBC	0.250	1	0.250	0.022	0.876
TABC	39.876	2	19.938	1.795	0.180
Error (Within)	1066.272	96	11.107		
Total	12703.652	215			

*Significant $p < 0.01$

**Significant $p < 0.0005$

TABLE 3

MEAN SCORES FOR THE NUMBER OF
DISAGREE ISSUES RECALLED

			Time 1	Time 2
High Credible Source	Clearly Stated Disagree Message	Clearly Agree- Clearly Disagree Order	2.222	2.000
		Clearly Disagree- Clearly Agree Order	2.333	1.777
	Equiv. Disagree Message	Clearly Agree- Equiv. Disagree Order	1.555	1.333
		Equiv. Disagree- Clearly Agree Order	2.222	1.777
	Clearly Stated Disagree Message	Clearly Agree- Clearly Disagree Order	1.777	1.666
		Clearly Disagree- Clearly Agree Order	2.333	1.888
Low Credible Source	Equiv. Disagree Message	Clearly Agree- Equiv. Disagree Order	1.777	1.444
		Equiv. Disagree- Clearly Agree Order	1.777	1.777
	Clearly Stated Disagree Message	Clearly Agree- Clearly Disagree Order	2.222	2.000
		Clearly Disagree- Clearly Agree Order	2.333	1.888
	Equiv. Disagree Message	Clearly Agree- Equiv. Disagree Order	2.000	1.555
		Equiv. Disagree- Clearly Agree Order	2.000	2.000
Unidentified Source	Clearly Stated Disagree Message	Clearly Agree- Clearly Disagree Order	2.222	2.000
		Clearly Disagree- Clearly Agree Order	2.333	1.888
	Equiv. Disagree Message	Clearly Agree- Equiv. Disagree Order	2.000	1.555
		Equiv. Disagree- Clearly Agree Order	2.000	2.000
	Clearly Stated Disagree Message	Clearly Agree- Clearly Disagree Order	2.222	2.000
		Clearly Disagree- Clearly Agree Order	2.333	1.888

Main Effect	Mean
High Credible Source	1.902
Low Credible Source	1.805
Unidentified Source	2.000
Clearly Stated Disagree Message	2.037
Equivocated Disagree Message	1.768
Agree-Disagree Order	1.796
Disagree-Agree Order	2.009
Time One	2.046
Time Two	1.759

TABLE 4
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE FOR THE NUMBER OF
DISAGREE ISSUES RECALLED

SOURCE	SS	DF	MS	F	P
Between Subjects	121.418	107			
A (Credibility)	1.362	2	0.681	0.588	0.563
B (Vagueness)	3.893	1	3.893	3.364	0.066
C (Order)	2.449	1	2.449	2.116	0.145
AB	0.232	2	0.116	0.100	0.904
AC	0.286	2	0.143	0.124	0.883
BC	0.560	1	0.560	0.484	0.505
ABC	1.564	2	0.782	0.676	0.516
Error (Between)	111.072	96	1.157		
Within Subjects	31.509	108			
T (Time)	4.449	1	4.449	16.859	0.0002
TA	0.176	2	0.088	0.333	0.722
TB	0.116	1	0.116	0.438	0.516
TC	0.042	1	0.042	0.158	0.694
TAB	0.008	2	0.004	0.017	0.984
TAC	0.360	2	0.180	0.684	0.512
TBC	0.782	1	0.782	2.965	0.084
TABC	0.232	2	0.116	0.439	0.654
Error (Within)	25.344	96	0.264		
Total	152.927	215			

*Significant $p < 0.001$

TABLE 5

MEAN SCORES FOR THE QUALITY OF
DISAGREE ISSUES RECALLED

			Time 1	Time 2
High Credible Source	Clearly Stated Disagree Message	Clearly Agree- Clearly Disagree Order	6.333	3.888
		Clearly Disagree- Clearly Agree Order	6.000	3.555
	Equiv. Disagree Message	Clearly Agree- Equiv. Disagree Order	4.000	2.111
		Equiv. Disagree- Clearly Agree Order	4.888	2.888
	Clearly Stated Disagree Message	Clearly Agree- Clearly Disagree Order	5.555	3.666
		Clearly Disagree- Clearly Agree Order	6.000	3.555
Low Credible Source	Equiv. Disagree Message	Clearly Agree- Equiv. Disagree Order	4.111	2.111
		Equiv. Disagree- Clearly Agree Order	4.555	3.111
	Clearly Stated Disagree Message	Clearly Agree- Clearly Disagree Order	5.555	4.000
		Clearly Disagree- Clearly Agree Order	6.777	3.555
	Equiv. Disagree Message	Clearly Agree- Equiv. Disagree Order	4.555	2.333
		Equiv. Disagree- Clearly Agree Order	4.888	3.000
Unidentified Source	Clearly Stated Disagree Message	Clearly Agree- Clearly Disagree Order	5.555	4.000
		Clearly Disagree- Clearly Agree Order	6.777	3.555
	Equiv. Disagree Message	Clearly Agree- Equiv. Disagree Order	4.555	2.333
		Equiv. Disagree- Clearly Agree Order	4.888	3.000
	Clearly Stated Disagree Message	Clearly Agree- Clearly Disagree Order	5.555	4.000
		Clearly Disagree- Clearly Agree Order	6.777	3.555

Main Effect	Mean
High Credible Source	4.208
Low Credible Source	4.083
Unidentified Source	4.333
Clearly Stated Disagree Message	4.870
Equivocated Disagree Message	3.546
Agree-Disagree Order	4.018
Disagree-Agree Order	4.398
Time One	5.268
Time Two	3.148

TABLE 6
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE FOR THE QUALITY OF
DISAGREE ISSUES RECALLED

SOURCE	SS	DF	MS	F	P
Between Subjects	1126.147	107			
A (Credibility)	2.250	2	1.125	0.107	0.899
B (Vagueness)	94.671	1	94.671	8.974	0.004*
C (Order)	7.782	1	7.782	0.738	0.603
AB	0.620	2	0.310	0.030	0.972
AC	0.454	2	0.227	0.021	0.979
BC	5.042	1	5.042	0.478	0.502
ABC	2.528	2	1.264	0.120	0.887
Error (Between)	1012.800	96	10.550		
Within Subjects	447.494	108			
T (Time)	242.782	1	242.782	120.483	0.0001**
TA	0.842	2	0.421	0.209	0.814
TB	2.449	1	2.449	1.215	0.272
TC	0.782	1	0.782	0.388	0.542
TAB	0.062	2	0.031	0.015	0.986
TAC	1.232	2	0.616	0.306	0.742
TBC	3.375	1	3.375	1.675	0.196
TABC	2.530	2	1.265	0.628	0.540
Error (Within)	193.440	96	2.015		
Total	1573.641	215			

*Significant $p < 0.01$

**Significant $p < 0.0001$